

# In the Kingdom of Fools

## Introduction

This story is basically a Kannada folk tale. It has been taken from the book 'Folk Tales from India' written by A.K. Ramanujan. It recounts a humorous story of a foolish King and his foolish ministers.

## Summary

There was a Kingdom of Fools. Both the King and the minister were foolish. They didn't want to run their Kingdom like other Kingdoms, so they decided to change night into day and day into night. People worked at night and slept during the day. Everything cost the same—a single *duddu* (one unit currency of their Kingdom). So, a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas all cost the same.

Once a guru and his disciple came to this kingdom. The guru thought it was dangerous to live there. But the disciple did not want to leave that place because there he

has access to good food at cheap prices. So, he stayed on and the guru left the kingdom.

One bright day, a thief broke into a rich merchant's house. He made a hole in the wall and sneaked in. While he was carrying out his loot, the wall collapsed and killed the thief on the spot. His brother ran to the King and complained that his brother has died while practising his ancient art. The King summoned the owner of the house at once. The owner said that the mason was responsible for the collapse of the wall. The mason was called in. The mason said that a dancing girl distracted his attention while he was building the wall. She was responsible for the collapse of the wall. The dancing girl pleaded that the goldsmith was responsible. He made her come many times that day because he did not make her jewellery. So, the goldsmith was called in. He said I could not make her jewellery because a rich merchant forced me to make jewellery for



the wedding of his son. The rich merchant was dead so his son was summoned and he was held responsible for the murder of the innocent thief. He was the same merchant whose wall was broken. The King gave him the death sentence.

He ordered a new stake to be made for the execution. But the stake was too big for the thin merchant to be executed. So, the King ordered his soldiers to search for a man who could fit the stake. They found the fat disciple and carried him to the place of execution. His pleas fell on deaf ears.

While he was waiting for his death, he prayed to his guru to help him. The guru had magical powers. He arrived at once to save his disciple. He scolded his disciple and then told him something in a whisper. Then he went to the King and said, "O wisest of Kings, who is greater— the guru or the disciple?" The King said that the guru is greater. Then the guru asked the King to put him to the stake first and his disciple next. There ensued a quarrel between the guru and the disciple to be put first to stake.

The King was perplexed on seeing them fight. He asked the guru what the mystery was. The guru took the King aside and whispered to him, "That stake belongs to the God of justice. It is new, whoever dies in it first will be reborn as the King of this country. And whoever goes next will be the future minister of this country.

The King talked with his minister and revealed to him the mystery. They decided to be executed themselves. That night the King and his minister went secretly to the prison and released the guru and the disciple. They then disguised themselves as the two and as arranged beforehand with loyal servants, were taken to the stake and were executed. As their bodies were taken down, the truth was discovered. The city was in confusion. People were worried for the future of the Kingdom. They begged the guru and the disciple to be their King and their minister. First they did not agree. After a lot of persuasion, they agreed on the condition that they could change all the old laws.

From then on, night was night again day was day again and people could get nothing for a *duddu*. It became like any other place.

## Message

The story conveys the message that we should avoid the company of fools at all costs.



## Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. The two strangers were amazed by what they saw around them and wandered around town till evening, when suddenly the whole town woke up and went about its nightly business.

(a) The 'two strangers' in the above extract are .....

(b) The 'nightly business' referred to here is the:

- (i) tilling the land
- (ii) running the business
- (iii) going to sleep
- (iv) tilling the land (farmers) and running the business (merchants)

(c) The two strangers were amazed because the whole city was .....

(d) The word 'wandered' means the same as .....

## Answers

(a) the guru and his disciple

(b) (iv) tilling the land (farmers) and running the business (merchants)

(c) under sleep

(d) roamed

2. "They are all fools. This won't last very long, and you can't tell what they'll do to you next."

(a) ..... spoke these words to ..... in the extract.

(b) What won't last very long?

(i) Cheapness of everything

(ii) Everything being costly

(iii) Free selling of everything

(iv) Bargaining of everything

(c) "They are all fools" refers to .....

(d) State whether the given statement is True or False. These words proved to be true later in the story.

## Answers

(a) The guru, his disciple

(b) (i) Cheapness of everything

(c) the residents of the city

(d) True

3. His brother ran to the king and complained, "Your Highness, when my brother was pursuing his ancient trade, a wall fell on him and killed him.

(a) ..... is referred to as 'my brother' in the given extract.

(b) What is the 'ancient trade' referred to in the extract?

(i) The profession of weaving clothes

(ii) The profession of constructing houses

(iii) The profession of robbing people's houses

(iv) The profession of tilling land

(c) 'Pursuing' here means .....

(d) A word from the extract which is an antonym of the word 'modern' is .....

## Answers

(a) A thief

(b) (iii) The profession of robbing people's houses

(c) doing/following

(d) ancient

4. "You're right. The case deepens. We must look into it. It is not easy to judge such complicated cases. Let's get that dancer, wherever she is."

(a) ..... is speaking these words to ..... in the above extract.





(b) What does the speaker mean by 'The case deepens'?

- (i) The speaker means that the matter is not complicated as it was thought earlier.
- (ii) The speaker means that the matter is less complicated than it was thought earlier.
- (iii) The speaker means that the matter is more complicated than it was thought earlier.
- (iv) The speaker means that the matter is very simple.

(c) The bricklayer accused ..... for the death of the thief.

(d) The meaning of the phrase 'look into' is .....

### Answers

- (a) The king; the mason (bricklayer)
- (b) (iii) The speaker means that the matter is more complicated than it was thought earlier.
- (c) a dancing girl
- (d) to investigate something

5. You've inherited everything from that criminal father of yours, his riches as well as his sins. I knew at once, even when I first set eyes on you, that you were at the root of this horrible crime. You must die.

(a) In the above extract, ..... spoke these words to .....

(b) The merchant inherited from his father:

- (i) riches (ii) sins
- (iii) Both (i) and (ii) (iv) None of these

(c) 'Riches' means .....

(d) A word from the above extract which is opposite in meaning to the word 'pleasant' is .....

### Answers

- (a) the king; the son of the rich merchant
- (b) (iii) Both (i) and (ii)
- (c) wealth
- (d) horrible

### Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What are the two strange things the guru and his disciple find in the Kingdom of Fools?

Ans. Following are the two strange things that the guru and his disciple find in the Kingdom of Fools:

- (i) People did their business at night instead of day.
- (ii) Everything cost the same, a single duddu, whether they bought a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas.

Q 2. Why did the disciple decide to stay in the Kingdom of Fools? Was it a good idea?

Ans. The disciple decided to stay in the Kingdom of Fools because everything there cost the same, i.e., a duddu. All the disciple wanted was good, cheap food. So, he decided to stay back.

It was not a good idea because it brought him to the brink of death.

Q 3. Why did the King want to punish the merchant?

Ans. A thief broke into the rice merchant's house during bright daylight he had made a hole in the wall and sneaked in and as he was carrying out his loot, the

wall of the old house collapsed on his head and killed him on the spot. The thief's brother complained about the merchant to the King and blamed him for his brother's death. Therefore, the King wanted to punish the merchant.

Q 4. Who is the real culprit according to the King? Why does he escape punishment?

Ans. According to the King, the merchant is the real culprit. He is the legal heir of his father. Therefore, he should be punished for his father's acts. The merchant escapes punishment because he is too thin to be properly executed on the stake.

Q 5. What are the Guru's words of wisdom? When does the disciple remember them?

Ans. The guru on realising that this is a Kingdom of Fools said to his disciple, "This is no place for us. Let's go." "They are all fools. This won't last very long and you can't tell what they'll do to you next."

The disciple remembers his guru's words when he is taken for execution merely because he was fat and could be properly executed on the stake.

### Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Name all the people who were tried in the King's court and give the reasons for their trial.

Ans. (i) **The Merchant:** His wall fell on a thief and killed him.

(ii) **The Bricklayer:** He built a weak wall which fell down and killed a thief.

(iii) **A Dancing Girl:** She was going up and down the street all day with her anklets jingling. She was young then she distracted the bricklayer who was building the wall. Because of this, he built a weak wall which fell down and killed a thief.

(iv) **The Goldsmith:** He made the dancer come many times to his shop. He gave her excuses because he couldn't finish her jewellery. He had to finish the rich merchant's order because they had a wedding coming and they couldn't wait.

(v) **The Rich Merchant:** He was tried again because his father had forced the goldsmith to complete his order first.

Q 2. How does the guru manage to save his disciple's life?

Ans. The guru on his arrival whispers his plan to his disciple. He then requests the King to put him on stake first. The disciple also requests the King to put him on stake first. They both quarrelled to be put on stake first. The King is not able to understand their behaviour. He asks for an explanation. The guru explains that the stake is the stake of justice. It is new and has never had a criminal on it. Whoever dies on it first will be reborn as the King of the country and whoever goes next will be the minister. The King on hearing this releases the disciple and decides to go on the stake himself. In this way, the guru manages to save his disciple.